

Torah Weekly

PARSHAT BESHALACH

7 – 13 Shevat 5786
25 – 31 January 2026

Torah Reading:

Beshalach: Exodus 13:17 - 17:16

Haftarah: Judges 4:4 - 5:31

Psalms for our brethren in the Holy Land

Psalms 117

1. Praise the Lord, all nations, laud Him, all peoples.
2. For His kindness has overwhelmed us, and the truth of the Lord is eternal. Hallelujah!

(Please say Chapter 20 daily)

Negative Mitzvah 195 - Gluttonous Eating and Drinking

A youth is forbidden to eat and drink in a gluttonous fashion, according to the specific [extreme] conditions that define a "rebellious son." (A rebellious son is put to death. As such, the Sages interpret the afore-cited verse to mean: "Do not eat [in such a manner that will cause] blood [i.e., death].")

SEEING IS BELIEVING?

When our first child was born, I stopped believing in G-d.

When people hear me say this, they are shocked. The rabbi doesn't believe in G-d?!

I'll explain.

I stopped believing. And I started knowing!

When you witness the miracle of creation with your own eyes, up close and personal, faith is unnecessary. The proof is right there.

Long before me, there was the legendary Chassidic master, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev. When he was a young student, he came home from his yeshiva studies for Passover, and his father asked him to share something he had learned. Levi Yitzchak said, "I learned that there is a G-d in this world." "What?!" exclaimed his father. "For this you had to go to yeshiva? Even our maid knows that!"

"Martha," he called to her. "Do you believe in G-d?"

"Of course, sir," answered Martha.

"She believes," said Levi Yitzchak. "But I know."

In Parshat Beshalach, we read about the Splitting of the Sea, arguably the biggest miracle in all of history. One of the verses, which found its way into our Siddur and daily prayers, reads as follows:

"And the people of Israel saw the great, mighty hand which G-d had inflicted upon the Egyptians ... and the people believed in G-d and in Moses his servant."

This is impressive? They saw the incredible miracle of the Splitting of the Sea, and they believed there was a G-d in the world? How could they not believe?! What's the big deal to see a miracle and then to believe?

Faith is about believing in G-d when He is not that obviously present in our lives. True faith is believing even when we are going through difficult or tragic times and G-d seems entirely absent.

To believe before seeing the miracle would be something worth writing about, but to believe after the miracle seems mundane, obvious, and even somewhat dull.

But I must tell you that in my own rabbinic practice I have seen all too frequently how people have remained untouched and unaffected after experiencing an event that was clearly miraculous.

Yes, some people don't believe even after the miracle! They attribute their good fortune to luck or coincidence. Others, however, see the hand of G-d in every experience.

I was at a wedding the other day and the father of the groom got up, but instead of speaking he sang a song. The main lyrics of the song are two well-known Hebrew words, "baruch Hashem," or, "blessed be G-d." Indeed, he had much to be thankful for. And when the whole crowd of hundreds of guests joined him in singing and repeating the words, "baruch Hashem, baruch Hashem," it was a particularly moving moment. If only we could all recognize the many miracles and deliverances in our daily lives with that kind of attitude!

My late father was the sole survivor of his entire family from Poland. I once asked him why he hadn't lost his faith the way so many other survivors had.

He replied that he had witnessed the unmistakable hand of G-d plucking him from one danger to the next. He escaped Poland, travelled to Vilna, then from Moscow to Vladivostok by train, by boat to Japan, and later Shanghai, before arriving in the United States after the war and meriting to rebuild his family.

"How could I not believe?" he said. The Israelites watched the sea split and saw their mortal enemies washed ashore. Their freedom from Egyptian bondage was finally assured. They saw the awesome hand of G-d ... and they believed.

I imagine there may well have been others who would have attributed their deliverance to some natural effect—perhaps El Nino or a freak tsunami. That our ancestors believed it was the hand of G-d is indeed a credit to them.

There are those who deny even the most blatantly obvious wonders, and then there are those who don't stop thanking G-d for even their smallest salvations. May we soon see the unmistakable hand of G-d bringing Redemption to our people, and peace and tranquility to our broken world.

RABBI SHMUEL SATAN (?-1380)

600 years ago, Church leaders and priests often incited mobs to attack

the Jewish ghetto in Prague, which caused a lot of suffering for the Jews at the hands of their Christian neighbors. Under the reign of King Wenceslaus IV, the position of the Jews worsened. The king took no interest in state affairs, preferring frivolous matters, such as eating, drinking, hunting, and indulging in luxuries. His ministers, who ran the state, were unfriendly to the Jews, taxing them heavily. The year 5149 (1389) was particularly tragic for the Jews of Prague. During the Christian Easter festival, a religious procession carrying crosses and images moved through the Altstadt ("Old Town"), where the Jewish ghetto was, to the Moldau River. A rumor spread that Jewish children threw stones at the crosses and images. A mob, whipped into a fury by priests, attacked the Jewish quarter, killed about three thousand Jewish men, women and children, and set the Jewish quarter ablaze. Despite the great loss of life and property which the Jews suffered from this cruel attack, a heavy fine of ten thousand pounds of silver was imposed on the Jews of Prague!

Two years later, in 5151 (1391), the Jews of Prague were dealt another blow. They had not yet recovered from the previous calamity when a further heavy tax was imposed upon the Jewish community in the sum of twenty thousand silver thaler. Moreover, Reb Shmuel, the President of the community, was informed that the money must be paid to the city treasury within eight days, otherwise all Jews would be expelled from Prague and their property taken over to cover the tax. Reb Shmuel's business affairs brought him in contact with the nobility, and he was able to obtain favors from the people of power, and influence for his downtrodden brethren. He was therefore known as the "Shtadlan" (intercessor).

Shocked by the new demand, Reb Shmuel went to the Chief Rabbi, Avigdor Kara, to consult with him. Rabbi Avigdor Kara then summoned the seven community leaders. After deliberating, it was decided that there was nothing to do but send a delegate to plead with the king for mercy. This was no simple matter. It was not easy to get an audience with the king, and it might be very dangerous for the delegate if an audience were obtained. But who among the king's ministers

PSALMS DAILY

SEFER HAMITZVOT

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would want to risk his position to persuade the king to receive a Jewish delegate?

At this point, Reb Shmuel rose and volunteered to appear before the king to intercede on behalf of the Jews of Prague.

But how, the other rabbis asked, would Rabbi Shmuel receive an audience with the king?

Rabbi Shmuel then told them about something that had happened to him: "I had not intended to tell anybody about this, but it may be a case, as our Sages say, where the Merciful One provides the cure before the malady strikes. Several years ago, I was travelling on a business trip, and turned my coach off the road into the woods to daven Mincha. Returning to my coach, I spotted a leather pouch on the ground. I picked it up and opened it, and saw it was filled with gold, gems, and documents which bore the royal seal. It was clear that the pouch belonged to a royal personage, if not the king himself. Examining the sealed documents further, I discovered the name of the King's treasurer on one of the envelopes.

"I went to the castle of the King's treasurer and informed the guard that I was there on important business. I was admitted to the treasurer's study and could see that he was in distress. I gave him the pouch, which he opened to examine its contents. Satisfied that nothing was missing, he embraced me and thanked me. 'Did you know what was in this pouch?' he asked. 'I had no choice but to look inside to identify the owner,' I replied. 'I had to deliver these documents to a foreign ambassador,' he said, 'whom I had arranged to meet on a hunt yesterday, and then I discovered that I had lost the pouch. I shall be forever indebted to you.'

'My dear Shmuel,' the treasurer said, 'the money is all yours; I had despaired of getting it back. It is the documents for which I would have to account to the King. You have saved my life and honor.' He took out the documents and offered me the pouch with the rest of its contents.

'G-d forbid that I should take any reward for a Mitzvah,' I said to him. Returning a lost article to its rightful owner is one of the precepts of our faith. I cannot accept any reward. The Mitzvah itself is my greatest reward.'

'How can I express my gratitude to you?' the treasurer exclaimed.

"I told him there was no need, but if an occasion arose when he could do a favor to any Jew, or Jewish community, that would be the time for him to express his gratitude to G-d. So now, I will turn to the King's treasurer, to see if he may arrange an audience with the king for me. The rest is up to G-d."

Reb Shmuel asked that Rabbi Avigdor Kara proclaim a day of fasting and prayer for all the

community that the Almighty bless his mission with success. Then, Reb Shmuel started on his mission. He was received warmly by the King's treasurer, who asked what he could do for him. Reb Shmuel told the Treasurer, who warned Reb Shmuel that the king had lately been in a bad mood and drinking heavily. "Even when sober, the king can be dangerous, but if he is drunk, your life will not be worth a coin," the treasurer told him. Then he said, "I have a better idea. I will loan you the money. I will make it a personal gift to you, since you refused it last time. Pay the tax and be done with it."

"This is very generous of you," Reb Shmuel answered, "but it is no solution. Today we pay this tax, and tomorrow there will be a heavier tax. My people are impoverished; we are constantly plundered and persecuted. I want to plead with the king for mercy and protection. Then we could do more for the king's treasury and for the country. I must get an audience with the king."

The treasurer ordered his coach and set out with Reb Shmuel for the king's palace. When they arrived, the treasurer left Reb Shmuel waiting and went into the royal chambers. He returned with a sad expression on his face. "My dear friend," he said. "The king is in an ugly mood. He agreed to my request that you appear before him, but he said you may only say four words. If you say even half a syllable more, you will forfeit your head! Believe me, I am sorry..."

"Four words?!" Reb Shmuel cried in dismay. He thought for a moment: "I have no choice. I must see the king even to say four words to him."

"Then let's go," the minister said, and he led Reb Shmuel to the king. The doors of the royal chamber opened wide, and both were admitted and bowed their heads respectfully.

"So this is the Jew?" the king said with a mocking smile on his face. "Well, speak your four words; not a sound more!"

Reb Shmuel stepped forward with dignity, and said, "Vayomer HaShem el haSatan." Then he bowed again, stepped back, and waited to be dismissed.

"Wait, what is it you said?" the king asked. Reb Shmuel pointed to his mouth, to indicate that his lips were sealed by the king's order. "Never mind that," the king said, "I withdraw the condition. You may speak freely."

"The four words, your majesty, are from our Holy Book, the Bible. They are from the seventh verse of the first chapter of the Book of Iyov (Job). The meaning of these words is that when it pleases G-d, the Supreme King of Kings, He descends from His Holy Throne and speaks even to the lowliest of all creatures, to Satan. More than once

did G-d speak to Satan, as that holy book tells us, and He gave Satan the opportunity to speak to Him to his heart's content. I pray that the illustrious King of Bohemia will be gracious enough to permit a poor, unfortunate and persecuted Jew, who is nevertheless one of his most loyal subjects, to speak to his majesty and pour out his heart before him..."

For a moment the king was silent, and his eyes blazed with anger at the impudence of the Jew. However, the courage with which Reb Shmuel spoke his words, and the way in which he caused the king to withdraw his condition won the king's admiration. The anger disappeared from his eyes, and he said to Reb Shmuel: "Very well. I shall listen to you."

Reb Shmuel pleaded for the king to have mercy on the Jewish community of Prague, to enable them to improve their economic position under the king's protection, so that they could continue to be useful citizens of the king and the country.

Reb Shmuel's words made a deep impression on King Wencelaus. "Go tell your people that the king has withdrawn the tax, and, moreover, frees them from taxes for the next two years. However, you deserve both a punishment and a reward: a punishment for your impudence in 'telling off' the king; a reward for your courage and wisdom. As a reward, I appoint you my Kammer-Jude: You shall be privileged to appear in my palace at any time; But what shall your punishment be? Tell me, what's your name?"

"Shmuel."

"Henceforth, you shall be known as 'Shmuel Satan, a hereditary title for you and your children."

BESHALACH IN A NUTSHELL

The name of the Parshah, "Beshalach," means "When he sent" Soon after the children of Yisroel leave Egypt, Pharaoh pursues them, and they find themselves trapped between his armies and the sea. G d tells Moses to raise his staff; the sea splits for the children of Yisroel to pass and closes over the Egyptians. Moses and the people sing a song of praise to G d.

In the desert, the people suffer thirst and hunger and complain to Moses and Aaron. G d sweetens the bitter waters of Marah and later brings water from a rock. He provides manna each morning and quails each evening.

The children of Yisroel gather a double portion of manna on Friday for Shabbat; some disobey on the seventh day and find none. Aaron preserves a small jar of manna for future generations.

At Rephidim, the Amalekites attack, but are defeated through Moses' prayers and Joshua's army.

IN JEWISH HISTORY

Monday, 8 Shevat 5786 – 26 January 2026

End of the "Elders Era" (1228 BCE)

The last of the Elders (z'keinim) who were contemporaries of Joshua and outlived him, passed away in the year 2533 after creation. They were part of the chain of Torah transmission as listed at the beginning of Ethics of the Fathers: "Moses received the Torah from Sinai and gave it over to Joshua. Joshua gave it over to the Elders, the Elders to the Prophets..." In ancient times, this day was marked as a fast day.

[Some are of the opinion that this occurred on the 5th of Shevat].

Tuesday, 9 Shevat 5786 – 27 January 2026

Belzer Rebbe Rescued From the Holocaust (1944)

After a series of hair-raising escapes from Gestapo agents in Poland and Hungary, R. Aharon Rokeach, fourth Rebbe of Belz, safely arrived in the Land of Israel. He was accompanied by his brother, R. Mordechai, father of the present Belzer Rebbe, R. Yissachar Dov.

Wednesday 10 Shevat 5786 – 28 January 2026

Lubavitcher Rebbe assumes leadership (1951)

At a gathering of Chassidim marking the first anniversary of the passing of the sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe, the late Rebbe's son-in-law, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, delivered a Chassidic discourse (maamar) entitled Basi LeGani ("I Came into My Garden"), signifying his formal acceptance of the leadership of the Chabad-Lubavitch movement.